DRAFT
JMB re: Proposed Overture to the 219th GA re: Amendment B
12/11/09

To John Vest and Calum

I do not have a recommendation regarding how this body should vote. Your opportunity and responsibility to discuss and vote is why I am a Presbyterian.

I want it to be clear: this overture is where I hope and pray my church ends up. I fully approve its intent.

I have personal reservations about it now and therefore do not endorse it.

In 1996 the 208th General Assembly put G. 6.0106b in:

requiring church officers "to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness."

I personally opposed it for a variety of reasons - among them - everyone knows we are not going to examine candidates for Elder or Deacon on their sexual behavior

I presided over the vote and resultant demonstration which included dear Fourth Presbyterian Church gay friends and my wife

I visited and spoke to 75 Presbyteries - virtually asking them to make a place for diversity of position on the issue over which Presbyterians disagree, to find a way to honor and respect differences on ordination to preserve the unity of the church (i.e. to defeat Amendment B)

Sometimes I was welcomed, sometimes criticized by proponents of B, and sometimes by opponents.

The Presbyteries voted to approve G.6.0106b decisively 114-57. Nevertheless I continued to hope for some accommodation - some third way.

<u>The Covenant Network</u>

Two more attempts to delete or change B have been defeated, one last year by a relatively close vote: 94-78.

Previous votes were 114-57 in 1997 and
127-46 in 2001

Change is happening.

In 2006 the Peace Unity and Purity Task Force issued its report after a two-year-long process involving church leaders such as John Wilkinson, Vicky Curtiss and Barbara Wheeler of Auburn Theological Seminary: and provided a way to live together by allowing declaration of conscience, “scruples” in ordination requirements, and left to the Governing Body (Session, Presbytery) the authority to decide whether the departure violates the tenants of the Reformed Faith.

In 3 prominent cases Presbyterians have heard departures of conscience (scruples) from the “fidelity/chastity” provision of G.10106b and ruled that they do not violate the tenants of the Reformed Faith:

there have been appeals - lengthy and costly, but there is progress in all three cases

and, in my opinion, it is very likely that all three will be ordained - the first openly gay/lesbian Presbyterian ministers

I understand the impatience of advocates. I experience it too. But the system is working and change is happening.

For the record, I regard it as almost certain that if this overture passes and if it is approved by a majority of Presbyteries (by no means absolutely certain, but more probable than ever), the other side will respond with overtures to the 2012 Assembly to restore the provision of G. 10106b.

So my position is - to allow the Peace Unity and Purity process and the judicial system more time to argue and sort this out - without the biannual battle on the floor of 170 Presbyteries - as a way to preserve something of the unity of the PC (USA) while moving toward change.